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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Human Rights Now, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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ISIL's sexual violence against Yezidi and other women and girls must be ceased immediately

1. Background

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which has occupied North Iraq since 2014, continuously targets specific ethnic or religious minorities including Yezidis, Christians, Turkmen and Shia, and subjects them to physical, sexual and other forms of brutal violence.

Among these groups, Yezidis, in particular, have been systematically targeted by ISIL, and a number of Yezidis have been hunted down and killed, enslaved, deprived of physical liberty, tortured, raped or made sex slaves. Although some parts in North Iraq once under ISIL control have now been liberated, it is reported that 3,000 to 3,500 people, mostly Yezidi women and children, remain in captivity by ISIL.[1] When ISIL captured Yezidis, they separated men and women. ISIL forced Yezidis to convert to Islam and killed the men who refused to convert. Yezidi women, including young girls who converted to Islam, were forced to marry ISIL fighters, and those who refused were treated as sex slaves or killed.[2]

ISIL's actions towards women, especially Yezidi women, have been ruthless. Sexual violence against women and girls is conducted as a part of ISIL's strategy to spread terror among those who oppose ISIL's ideology. Access to women and girls is also used to recruit ISIL fighters, and ISIL raises funds through selling or ransoming captured Yezidis and other women and girls.[3] According to OHCHR's report on ISIL, ISIL regards women and children in ISIL captivity as "spoils of war which it owns."[4] Yezidi women and girls are raped through forced marriage, allotted as 'gifts', and sold repeatedly by ISIL fighters, thereby subjected to repeated sexual assault and rape. ISIL has published pamphlets and magazines justifying the sexual enslavement of Yezidi and other women and girls.[5] It is difficult to obtain accurate numbers and locations of women and girls

[1] The figure is as of April 2015, see UNAMI/OHCHR 'Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014 – 30 April 2015' (13 July 2015)

[2] UNAMI/OHCHR 'Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014 – 30 April 2015' (13 July 2015), 'Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups' (A/HRC/28/18) (27 March 2015)

[3] UNAMI/OHCHR 'Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014 – 30 April 2015' (13 July 2015), Security Council 'Conflict-related sexual violence Report of the Secretary-General' (S/2015/203) (23 March 2015), UN News Centre 'Senior UN official warns of 'widespread and systematic' sexual violence in Syria, Iraq' (7 May 2015), available at: http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50794#.VdBHNUJ1QTY, UNAMI Press Releases & Statements 'UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Concludes Five-Country Visit to the Middle East Rape, Sexual Slavery and Forced Marriage Used as Tactics of Terror' (11 May 2015), available at: http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=3764:un-special-representative-of-the-secretary-general-on-sexual-violence-in-conflict-concludes-five-country-visit-to-the-middle-east-rape-sexual-slavery-and-forced-marriage-used-as-tactics-of-terror&Itemid=605&lang=en

[4] 'Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups' (A/HRC/28/18) (27 March 2015)

[5] 'Questions and answers on taking captives and slaves' that describes how to treat captured women and girls,' see BBC News 'Islamic State: Yazidi women tell of sex-slavery trauma,' available at: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30573385, *Dabiq vol.9*, see UNAMI/OHCHR 'Report

in ISIL captivity because they are frequently transferred to different places, including abandoned houses, schools and prisons within ISIL territory including Syria.[6] ISIL frequently displaces captive women and girls in order to mentally control them.

2. Recent interviews with Yezidi women

Japan Iraq Medical Network (JIM-NET), a Japanese nonprofit organization, in collaboration with Human Rights Now, conducted interviews with ten (10) Yezidi women and girls aging from twelve (12) to thirty (30) who were captured by ISIL at the beginning of August 2014 when ISIL attacked the Sinjar District in Northwest Iraq, where many Yezidis lived. They escaped from their abductions and fled to the Kurdistan region around May to July 2015. These recent interviews clearly demonstrate that ISIL fighters continue to subject Yezidis to cruel and inhuman treatment as reported in the OHCHR report.[7]

According to our interviews with Yezidi women and girls, when they were captured by ISIL, they were separated from Yezidi men and then frequently moved within ISIL occupied areas, including Sinjar, Tal Afar, and Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqa, Syria. They were detained in many places such as prisons, schools, abandoned houses or houses of ISIL fighters. For instance, a 12-year-old Yezidi girl stated that she was taken to an abandoned house in Syria with two of her cousins and was raped by two ISIL fighters once every three days.

Yezidi women were repeatedly sold or exchanged with other Yezidi women among ISIL fighters and raped. Often, they were repeatedly forced to 'marry' ISIL fighters and raped. For example, a 19-year-old Yezidi girl stated that she was sold or exchanged among five ISIL fighters. Another woman was first forced to marry (and hence be raped by) an ISIL commander, and was then sold to his cousin in Syria the next day; and after 25 days, she was again sold to another ISIL fighter who died 15 days later. She was then taken to another man in Syria as a housekeeper.

Many Yezidi women and girls talked of inhuman treatment by ISIL fighters including physical abuse, confinement and limited food. For instance, a 19-year-old Yezidi girl said that she was confined in a locked house and was not given water or food for 24 hours. Moreover, a 15-year-old Yezidi girl stated that she was sold to an ISIL fighter, and when she resisted being raped by him, he broke her front teeth by hitting her with a wooden stick. Furthermore, another 15-year-old Yezidi girl said that when she disobeyed orders made by ISIL fighters, they confined her in a toilet for 20 days and did not provide meals except for a piece of bread and a bottle of water per day.

The interviewed women and girls managed to escape ISIL captivity. Some of them were able to escape because their relatives paid some men to help them escape. However, many of the interviewed Yezidis said they have family members who remain in ISIL captivity; or they do not have any information about some of their family members.

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on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014 – 30 April 2015' (13 July 2015)

[6] UNAMI/OHCHR 'Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014 – 30 April 2015' (13 July 2015), 'Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups' (A/HRC/28/18) (27 March 2015)

[7] 'Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups' (A/HRC/28/18) (27 March 2015)

3. Recommendations

As stated above, human rights violations, in particular, inhumane sexual violence including sexual enslavement against Yezidi women are widespread and systematic attacks against civilians, which may constitute crimes against humanity. Many women and girls are in ISIL captivity and are subjected to ruthless abuse, which must be ceased immediately. Those who have perpetrated such human right abuses must bear criminal responsibility. In addition, the women and girls who escaped ISIL captivity experienced terrible physical and mental harm and are still suffering from trauma. It is essential that they be provided with appropriate medical and psychological treatment.

Considering the gravity of violations, Human Rights Now urges the Human Rights Council to make a resolution to request further investigation focusing on the issue of ISIL's sexual violence and other women and girls. Furthermore, we urge the Security Council to refer the situation of ISIL's sexual violence against Yezidi and other women and girls to the International Criminal Court to bring justice to the perpetrators for those crimes.

Additionally, we urge the Iraq Government to take all effective measures to address the issue, including liberating women and girls in ISIL captivity and protecting those who escaped ISIL captivity. We also urge the Iraq Government to respect and protect the fundamental human rights of all those living in the country, including religious, ethnic and sectarian minorities. The government must redress the root causes of the conflict, restore rule of law, and ensure justice and accountability for all grave human rights violations.

Moreover, we urge the international community to provide long-term medical care and psychological support for the victims. We also request states to provide security, shelter and mental care for the victims, by accepting them as refugees and providing humanitarian treatment.